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SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES BRIEF G-16

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary. Presidential candidates Elvin Santos of the Liberal Party, Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo of the National Party, Felicito Avila of the Christian Democratic Party and Bernard Martinez of the Social Democratic Innovation and Unity Party (PINU) all told the G-16 donors' group that the international community should recognize the elections scheduled for November 29. Avila told the G-16 representatives that any solution to the country's political crisis must present a basis for addressing the country's problems and Martinez said it must be in conformity with the constitution. The four candidates are discussing institution of a unity government when the new administration takes office in January 2010. End Summary.

12. (C) The G-16 donors' group met with presidential candidates Elvin Santos of the Liberal Party, Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo of the National Party, Felicito Avila of the Christian Democratic Party, and Bernard Martinez of the Social Democratic Innovation and Unity Party (PINU). The meeting with Santos took place on September 18 and the one with Lobo on September 19, both before the unexpected September 21 return of President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya to Honduras. The G-16 met with both Avila and Martinez together on October 16. On September 16, Santos, Lobo, Avila, and Martinez met with Costa Rican President Oscar Arias in San Jose and subsequently issued a communique supporting the San Jose process. On September 24, they met with de facto regime leader Roberto Micheletti and subsequently with President Zelaya at the Brazilian Embassy.

The Crisis and San Jose

13. (C) Lobo and Santos both addressed the G-16 shortly after their meeting with President Arias. Santos told the G-16 that he was impressed with Arias' openness to the candidates' concerns and his willingness to listen to reasonable suggestions. Lobo told the G-16 that, although he supported the San Jose Accord, he would not agree to its imposition on the country because that would result in a bloodbath. Santos cautioned that if the San Jose was imposed at the time he was addressing the G-16, it would lead to greater conflict in Honduras within six months.

14. (C) Avila told the G-16 representatives that the solution to the country's political crisis cannot just address the current situation. He said it needs to establish a base from which to address the country's problems in the coming years. Avila said the political, economic, and social conditions in Honduras must be improved and the country needs equity.

Avila noted that if the presidential candidates were to call for the restoration of President Zelaya, they would appear to be contradicting their campaign platforms. He added that supporting President Zelaya's restoration to the office of president would send a message that it is acceptable to violate the Constitution.

15. (C) Martinez stated that Honduras' political crisis did not begin on June 28. He said Honduras' mistake was forcing Zelaya out of the country. Martinez told the G-16 that just because foreign nations do not like the Honduran Constitution, does not mean that it should not be followed. Martinez said that any solution to the political crisis must be in conformity with the constitution. Martinez stated that the only way President Zelaya could return to power in conformity with the constitution would be for all persons eligible to fill the position of chief executive to resign, leaving a vacuum. The congress would then call on private citizen Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya to lead a new transitional government.

The Election

16. (C) All four candidates called on the international community to recognize the electoral process and the winner of the presidential election scheduled for November 29. Both Santos and Lobo told the G-16 that the election is unrelated to the events of June 28. Santos said the elections are a solution to Honduras' political crisis and should not be used by the international community as a negotiating tool to achieve a resolution to the crisis. Santos said President

TEGUCIGALP 00001020 002 OF 002

Zelaya and his supporters do not support the elections and just want anarchy. Lobo also said that President Zelaya never intended to allow elections to be held. He noted that he sees no alternative to the elections. Martinez also posed the question of who would govern the country if the elections are not held. Martinez told the G-16 that the international community should not punish Honduras for the error of sending Zelaya out of the country by refusing to recognize the elections. He said the elections are necessary for democracy to continue and urged the international community to support the process and send electoral observers.

Unity Government

17. (C) Lobo told the G-16 that the four candidates had discussed setting up a unity government after the inauguration in January 2010. Martinez told the G-16 that he is ready to participate in a unity government. Avila said that whoever wins the presidential election will be unable to govern alone, even if he obtains an electoral majority. However, Avila cautioned that he will not join a unity government that merely amounts to a division of government posts. He said there must be a project for the development of the country that includes all relevant sectors.

18. (C) Comment: The presidential candidates have shown strong leadership in urging both President Zelaya and Micheletti and their supporters to negotiate in good faith. They, as representatives of Honduras' future, may be key to achieving a solution to the political crisis. End Comment.